



SIECUS



FOR
YOUTH &
SEXUALITY

WHAT DOES THE WORLD CONGRESS OF FAMILIES REALLY STAND FOR?

As articulated and reiterated in numerous human rights treaties and international consensus documents, everyone has the right to be free from discrimination, coercion and violence and make his or her own choices concerning sexuality, reproduction, marriage, and whether or not to have children. These rights are legally protected in the Netherlands and other countries around the world that support basic human rights principles. However, groups such as the World Congress of Families do not recognize these rights, claiming true morality, and seeking to restrict rights and freedoms of others. The World Population Foundation, CHOICE, for youth and sexuality, Siecus and Ipas are concerned with the position, statements and actions of the WCF.

This factsheet highlights the positions, statements, and actions around several key issue areas addressed by supporters and organizers of the World Congress of Families (WCF). They are listed here along with counter-arguments that demonstrate the discriminatory nature of their objectives and how they are inconsistent with international human rights law.

THE SO-CALLED “NATURAL FAMILY”

The WCF's guiding principles and beliefs are laid out in their 1999 Geneva Declaration; the overarching purpose which is to promote and defend the “natural family”.

The Declaration defines the “natural human family” as “the fundamental social unit, inscribed in human nature, and centered on the voluntary union of a man and a woman in the lifelong covenant of marriage.”¹

- The WCF believes the “purpose” of the natural family is: 1) to procreate; 2) to raise children; and 3) to “regulate” sexuality.²
- According to the WCF the “natural family” can only be the marriage between a man and woman. “Incompatible constructs” – such as same-sex marriage, divorced couples and single parents – are seen as “unnatural.”³
- In December 2008 an international coalition of rightwing organizations led by three WCF partners, (Concerned Women for America, United Families International, and the Catholic Family and Human Rights Institute), petitioned the U.N. to “return to the original understanding of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as protecting the right to life and the natural family.”⁴
- The WCF claims that the natural family is derived from the 1948 United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), stating that it “seek[s] to restore the natural family as the fundamental social unit and the ‘seedbed’ of civil society (as found in the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948).”⁵

What the 1948 U.N. Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) *actually* says:

- *The 1948 U.N. Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) does not mention, refer to, or define the “natural family;”*
- *The only reference to both “family” and “natural” in the UDHR is found in Article 16, which states that “The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State.”*

ABORTION

The WCF does not support the right to legal abortion.⁶

- The WCF promotes the idea that abortion not only threatens the life of the fetus, but also the mental and physical health of women who chose to end their pregnancies.⁷
 - *No scientific evidence exists to support the idea that all women who have abortions experience so-called “post-abortion syndrome.” Due to the lack of scientific evidence, the American Psychiatric Association does not recognize “post-abortion syndrome” as a diagnosis.⁸*
- Professor Joel Brind Ph.D., a WCF participant since 1999, is one of the leading proponents of the myth that abortion increases the risk of breast cancer.⁹
 - *Studies with strong research designs conducted throughout the world with hundreds of thousands of women unanimously conclude that women with either spontaneous or induced abortion do not have a subsequent elevated risk for developing breast cancer.¹⁰*
- Allan Carlson, International Secretary of the WCF, has stated that “abortion goes against the spirit of the 1948 UN Declaration of Human Rights.”¹¹
 - *Article 1 opens the Universal Declaration of Human Rights [Universal Declaration] with the fundamental statement of inalienability: “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.”¹² Significantly, the history of the negotiations indicates that the word “born” was used intentionally to exclude the foetus or any antenatal application of human rights. An amendment was proposed to delete “born,” in part, it was argued, to protect the right to life from the moment of conception, and was rejected.*
 - *One drafter explained that the statement “All human beings are born free and equal...” meant that the right to freedom and equality was “inherent from the moment of birth.”¹³ Thus, a foetus is not a holder of rights under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The deliberately gender-neutral term “everyone,” utilized thereafter in the Declaration to define the holders of human rights, refers to born persons only.¹⁴*
 - *Similarly, the records of negotiations of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the Convention of the Rights of the Child show that attempts to recognize the right to life before birth during the writing of the treaty were rejected. These and other documents support the position that recognizing the right to life from conception would interfere significantly with women’s basic human rights.¹⁵*

POLITICAL INFLUENCE OF THE WCF ON “ANTI-FAMILY” POLICIES AND SAME-SEX MARRIAGE

The WCF advocates against policies they believe will harm the “natural family.” This includes, among other issues, arguing that heterosexuality is the “natural order” and that children can only reach their true potential if they develop in the same home as their two natural parents. Following are three recent examples of the WCF’s international advocacy opposing same sex-marriage and the rights of all individuals, including those who are gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender.

- WCF categorizes any sexual orientation other than heterosexuality as a deviation from sexual norms, that leads to “obsession, remorse, alienation and disease,” ranking it with “pornography, promiscuity, incest.”¹⁶ To this end they advocate against progressive initiatives to protect the rights of all individuals, including those who are gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender. This includes a public condemnation of the General Assembly of the Organization of American States’ (OAS) “Resolution on Human Rights, Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity,” claiming that “Once again, a political institution has been co-opted by the international homosexual movement. This is yet another example of a transnational organization that has chosen to enlist with one side in the culture war, to the manifest displeasure of majorities in the nations they represent.
- In July 2009 Romania enacted the country’s new civil code, which defines marriage as only between a man and women. According to the WCF, they played a key role in galvanizing the international community to influence the debate by circulating the “Leadership Petition in Support of Romania’s Defense of Marriage,” which they claim was signed by more than “100 pro-family leaders in over 20 countries.”¹⁷

The WCF also played a behind the scenes role in the legislative debate. The U.S.-based Alliance Defense Fund (ADL), a WCF partner and co-sponsor, “provided legal counsel to several prominent Romanian parliamentarians who eventually introduced and ensured the passage of the key articles on marriage and family.”¹⁸ The new civil code will go into effect in January 2010.

WCF International Secretary, Allan Carlson explained that the recent events in Romania show “the value of forging an international pro-family movement, and highlights the importance of the upcoming World Congress of Families V in Amsterdam.”¹⁹

- Also in July 2009, the Lithuanian Parliament voted to adopt the “Law on the Protection of Minors against the Detrimental Effect of Public Information,” which enters into force March 2010. According to Amnesty International this law is of serious concern because it violates regional human rights treaties that Lithuania is a party to. Specifically, it violates the right to freedom of expression and the prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation.²⁰ This law could have the effect of institutionalizing homophobia and prohibiting legitimate discussion of homosexuality.²¹

According to Sharon Slater of WCF member organization Family Watch, the WCF played a significant role in the passage of the law. She writes: “I would like to think that a pro-family group of Lithuanian men with whom we worked on this issue at the last WCF in Warsaw, Poland helped make that happen.”

Slater goes on to say “One of our goals at the WCF in Amsterdam this year is to train more pro-family leaders in tactics to more effectively advocate for the family.”²²

¹ http://www.worldcongress.org/WCF2/wcf2_declaration.htm

² http://www.worldcongress.org/WCF/wcf_tnf.htm

³ http://www.worldcongress.org/WCF/wcf_tnf.htm

⁴ <http://www.worldcongress.org/wcfnl/htm/2009/wcfnl.0901.htm>

⁵ <http://news.prnewswire.com/ViewContent.aspx?ACCT=109&STORY=/www/story/07-07-2009/0005056112&EDATE=>

⁶ http://www.profam.org/THC/xthc_principles.htm

⁷ http://www.worldcongress.org/WCFUupdate/Archive08/wcf_update_819.htm

⁸ American Psychiatric Association. (2002). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (4th ed., text revision) (DSM-IV-TR). Arlington, VA: Author.

⁹ http://www.worldcongress.org/wcf2_spkrs/wcf2_brind.htm

¹⁰ The Collaborative Group on Hormonal Factors in Breast Cancer, based in Oxford University, summarized the results from 53 separate studies (both prospective and retrospective) done in 16 different countries with liberal abortion laws, which included about 83,000 women with breast cancer-- *Beral V, Bull D, Doll R, et al. Collaborative Group on Hormonal Factors in Breast Cancer. Breast cancer and abortion: Collaborative reanalysis of data from 53 epidemiological studies, including 83,000 women with breast cancer from 16 countries. Lancet. 2004;363:1007-1016.* A study conducted by Melbye and colleagues included all Danish women born between 1935 and 1978 (a total of 1.5 million women). The researchers linked data from the National Registry of Induced Abortions with the Danish Cancer Registry, so the information was complete and not influenced by recall bias--*Melbye M, Wohlfahrt J, Olsen JH, et al. Induced abortion and the risk of breast cancer. N Engl J Med. 1997;336:81-85.* A prospective study published by Harvard researchers in 2007 included 105,716 women ages 29-46 at the initiation of the study in 1993. They were followed until 2003-- *Michels KB, Xue F, Colditz GA, Willett WC. Induced and spontaneous abortion and incidence of breast cancer among young women. Arch Intern Med. 2007;167:814-820.* A prospective study on the role of spontaneous and induced abortion on breast cancer risk included 267,361 women recruited into the European Prospective Investigation into Cancer and nutrition (EPIC) between 1992 and 2000. The data were collected from 19 centers, across 9 countries--*Reeves GK and collaborators. Breast cancer risk in relation to abortion: Results from the EPIC study. Int. J. Cancer: 119, 1741-1745 (2006).*

¹¹ <http://www.profam.org/press/wcf.pr.071102.htm>

¹² UN GAOR 3rd Comm., 99th mtg. at 110-124, UN Doc. A/PV/99, 1948. Article 1 was adopted with this language by 45 votes, with nine abstentions. UN GAOR 3rd Comm., 183rd mtg. at 119, UN Doc. A/PV/183, 1948.

¹³ J Morsink, Women's rights in the Universal Declaration, *Human Rights Quarterly* 13 (1991), pp. 229-256.

¹⁴ Thanks to the International Legal Program at the Center for Reproductive Rights for the research on the history and interpretation of right to life provisions in human rights instruments.

¹⁵ The Center for Reproductive Rights

¹⁶ http://www.profam.org/THC/xthc_principles.htm

http://www.worldcongress.org/WCF2/wcf2_declaration.htm

¹⁷ <http://worldcongress.org/wcfnl/wcfnl.cur.pdf>

¹⁸ <http://www.alliancedefensefund.org/news/pressrelease.aspx?cid=5013>

¹⁹ <http://worldcongress.org/wcfnl/wcfnl.cur.pdf>

²⁰ "Amnesty International condemns adoption of homophobic law in Lithuania" Amnesty International Public Statement, July 14, 2009.

²¹ *Ibid*

²² "Some Good News Worldwide," *The Family Watch*, Family Watch International July 31, 2009